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June 16, 2020

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs  
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Jacobs:

As a Member of Congress representing Florida, a state vulnerable to hurricanes, I write to respectfully request that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) carefully consider expanding the length of its official Atlantic hurricane season—which covers hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea—based on storm activity in recent years.

The current Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1<sup>st</sup> through November 30<sup>th</sup>, and has not been changed since 1965. However, it is no longer clear that this season accurately predicts hurricane activity. This presents a practical problem, because government officials and residents in hurricane-prone states use this season to inform their funding choices, public awareness campaigns, and preparation decisions. Accordingly, an official season that does not accurately predict major storm activity could result in readiness being compromised and people and property being harmed.

Recent evidence suggests that NOAA should consider expanding the Atlantic hurricane season to include the latter part of May. In each of the past six years, from 2015 through 2020, at least one named tropical storm (defined as a tropical cyclone with surface winds ranging from 39 to 73 miles per hour, the level below a Category 1 hurricane) formed in the Atlantic Basin prior to June 1<sup>st</sup>. Furthermore, according to a spokesman for the National Hurricane Center (NHC), tropical storms have formed in the Atlantic Basin between May 15<sup>th</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup> “in about half of the past 10-15 years.”<sup>1</sup> According to the NHC spokesman, this represents a marked departure from the previous 30 years, when there was no such recorded storm activity during the latter half of May.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Fleshler, *Official start to hurricane season could move to May as early storms become more frequent*, South Florida Sun-Sentinel (May 10, 2020), available at <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/weather/hurricane/fl-ne-hurricane-season-early-storms-20200514-d74esnmvmvgydnhotnn4kgoo64-story.html>.

This year alone, there have already been three named tropical storms—Arthur, Bertha, and Cristobal—that made landfall in the continental United States, forming on May 17<sup>th</sup>, May 27<sup>th</sup>, and June 2<sup>nd</sup>, respectively. Tropical Storm Cristobal is the earliest third tropical storm on record, and it spawned a tornado in my Central Florida district.<sup>2</sup> There are multiple possible explanations—or a combination of explanations—for this trend of earlier storms, one of which is the warming of our oceans due to climate change.

NOAA’s noble mission is to “understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts [and] to share that knowledge and information with others.” Likewise, the NHC’s mission is to “save lives, mitigate property loss, and improve economic efficiency by issuing the best watches, warnings, forecasts, and analyses of hazardous tropical weather.” I believe that the recent increase in pre-season storms should lead NOAA to conduct a thorough, scientifically-sound review of whether the Atlantic hurricane season should be updated accordingly.

I hope you will undertake such an analysis and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie', with a stylized, flowing script.

Stephanie Murphy  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> See Travis Fedschun, *Tropical Storm Cristobal spawns damaging tornado in Orlando; Louisiana brothers, 8 and 10, killed in rip current*, Fox News (June 7, 2020), available at <https://www.foxnews.com/us/tropical-storm-cristobal-tornado-orland-florida-outer-band-rip-current-louisiana-brothers-killed>.